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The University of Chicago

THE PROPHET AS MYSTIC;  
HIS PSYCHOLOGY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND LITERATURE  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE AND INTERPRETATION

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BY

HERBERT WALDO HINES

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## THE PROPHET AS MYSTIC

BY HERBERT W. HINES  
Kankakee, Illinois

The task of probing prophecy is passing from the purview of historical criticism to the field of psychology and is centering on that ineffable prophetic experience from which emerges the authoritative conviction that God himself puts his words into the prophet's mouth. There has been a tendency in this direction for some time. Professor A. B. Davidson, in his *Old Testament Prophecy*, gives us three chapters where he enters frankly into the psychological problem and ably discusses one phase of the prophetic psychology. He concludes that "being moved by the spirit" is not so distinctive, but that it might be confused with one's natural emotions, and probably it had no characteristic by which it could be distinguished from the natural activities of the mind itself. The prophetic state was one of perception, of various advancing degrees of high mental tension, ranging from intuition and self-controlled excitation to asthenic ecstasy. He reminds us emphatically that what he has been defining is the condition of prophecy: *nota bene*, "condition of prophecy"; the states of the human mind with which the Spirit of Revelation allied Himself. These are his words: "There was a connection between the Spirit of God and the mind of the prophet, but it is miraculous and so evades definition."<sup>1</sup> From this we may readily see that for us Professor Davidson's explanation of prophecy is a *statement of the problem*, for his doctrine that the source of prophecy is inspiration and that prophetic revelations have a definite divine quantum is precisely what we want to have explained. To take up the inquiry, then, where Davidson left off; what, speaking psychologically, is "inspiration"?

Another student of the prophets faces just this question and entitles his book accordingly *The Inspiration of Prophecy*.<sup>2</sup> In his analysis he selects the word "Hallucination" as best describing psychologically the voices and visions of the prophets. They were

<sup>1</sup> *Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> G. Joyce, *The Inspiration of Prophecy*.



hallucinations in the sense that they were true sensations externalized by the percipient, the originating cause of which lay within the mind of the prophet. He heard a voice speaking to him, to which there was no objectively corresponding reality in the material world. That which produced these sensations was a movement within. This movement within the heart or mind of the prophet was not self-originated but was originated by an objective agent at work, i.e., the Spirit of God.

Thus, according to Joyce, psychical vision is considered a rare human capacity bestowed upon man by the Creator, "like every other faculty, in order that it may be used in His service and to man's benefit; like every other faculty it may be abused and desecrated."<sup>1</sup> So inspiration is explained by implanting in man a God-given faculty of perceiving the rustling of the divine afflatus in the soul of man. Besides putting us in the realm of the older, discarded "faculty" psychology, it restates our main problem in another form and still leaves us to inquire, what is this God-implanted faculty or human power to grasp new, God-given truth? Incidentally, we refuse to abide by the following obstruction which our author imposes: "Whatever light may be thrown upon the phenomena of prophecy by comparison with other religious experience the innermost secret will remain inviolate."<sup>2</sup>

Another book that faces our problem in its very title is J. H. Kaplan's *Psychology of Prophecy* in which the peculiarly prophetic elements of "call, premonition, revelation, dream, vision, audition, ecstasy and inspiration" are frankly treated as material for psychological analysis. In these words he makes bold to say that no presupposition shall hem him in: "Prophecy is a human process, a mind-process, and must be studied from a human point of view as a branch of psychology."<sup>3</sup> Says Kaplan: "The prophetic call is nothing but the moment in which the prophet became conscious of that sudden, inexplicable and awful premonition of the nation's imminent fall."<sup>4</sup> As for the psychology of this premonition, it is an intuition, an instinctive cognition of future events. In the realm of the human mind premonition is a delicate instinctive adjustment

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

for "catching distant vibration or over-tones of the operations of the universe."<sup>1</sup>

In his chapter on "revelation" Dr. Kaplan offers us the following description of that phenomenon: "A sudden mysterious awareness of an inflow of thought, an inundation of spirit, an awakening of mind, seemingly from unaccountable sources, and therefore, believed to be from non-natural channels, from a supernatural agency."<sup>2</sup> These revelations are the result of a profound contemplation on a given theme—silent contemplation usually held in retirement from all surrounding disturbing factors. But our author bids adieu to the real heart of the problem in these words: "Now, while it may not be possible for me to formulate at present any satisfactory definition of revelation, I am convinced that such a definition must be sought in this *yet unexplained field* of psychology," and states the problem by citation of Tennyson's words:

Moreover, something is or seems,  
That touches me with mystic gleams  
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams.

He does not hint at the psychology of mysticism, but the Tennyson verse shows he has led us thereto, indicating unwittingly the direction in which the next step is to be taken.

Another study leads us to the threshold of our problem, viz., D. E. Thomas, *The Psychological Approach to Prophecy*. It approaches the subject from the point of view of functional psychology, taking into account four factors for the understanding of prophecy psychologically: antecedents and inheritances, environment, temperament, and prophetic experience. Dr. Thomas has undoubtedly given us a plan of approach that will furnish the material necessary for a solution of the problem. These four factors are vital in the psychological study of the prophets; they indicate the direction the critical study of this theme must take in order to compile adequate data for the psychology of prophecy, and the book is well named "Approach."

By far the most thoroughgoing and serious attempt to study the prophetic experience from a strictly psychological point of view is that of Hölscher in the first part of his book on the Prophets.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Die Propheten: Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels*, 1914.



He assumes the right to probe psychologically the inner experience of the prophet and claims the possibility of full explanation, but he protests the lack of value and appreciation of these facts of prophetic experience in some quarters in these words: "Wenn jemand heute jene Erscheinungen der Religionsgeschichte und ihre Träger Fantasten nennt, so sagt er damit nur, dass ihm persönlich die betreffenden seelischen Vorgänge unverständlich sind, dass er nicht übersieht, wie die Gefühlswerte bestimmter Vorstellungen zustande kommen, und dass die ganze Erscheinung vom normalen bürgerlichen Leben stark abweicht."<sup>1</sup>

He refuses to put the prophetic experiences down as abnormalities off the beaten track of normal psychical life, but insists that they are normal conditions of consciousness changed by an exceptional intensifying of the emotions. In a study of the "emotions" he finds the clue to the problem. The psychical experience of the prophet is accompanied by a strong excitement of mind; the highest levels of these excitations are called Ecstasy. Since the word "ecstasy" says nothing about the cause of excitation, it may be used of religious and non-religious experience alike.

There are as many forms of ecstasy as of feeling. The psychical and physical concomitants of ecstasy are the same as those of the emotions. Emotional disturbances dam up the regular course of consciousness and have divergent effects on the course of ideas and bodily movements. There are two forms of affects or changes and interchanges in the realm of consciousness; these are either a concentration of consciousness upon a narrow circle of ideas or a condition of loss of self-feeling, with or without confusion of the course of thought.

This disturbance due to central stimulation, not to external sense impression, when of greater intensity, furnishes a condition for hallucination. Our author presents the psychological basis or cause of the hallucination, and then points out that the general susceptibility of the nervous system is of great importance for the disposition to have hallucinations, some individuals being very susceptible. The background and material for hallucinations come from moral sense perceptions. Impressions of recent experiences emerge in the hallucination. The same things are true of visions. Hypnosis is

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.



psychically similar, except that in the limiting of consciousness to a circumscribed circle of ideas, the suggestion determines the circle of ideas. The suggestion may come from without or from the person himself (i.e., auto-suggestion). Auto-suggestion of course pre-supposes a special sensitivity of the nervous system, and hence it follows that "practice makes perfect."

Thus Hölscher offers a treatment that is worthy of being considered epochal in the progress in prophetic studies from the historical field to the psychological. But he does not utilize the great advance made in the three branches or fields of psychology during the few years before and immediately preceding the appearance of his work; the Psychology of Religion, Social Psychology, and the newest of all, Psychology of Mysticism. According to these, religion does not arise from any "innate tendency" or "religious instinct," which leads men to fear, praise, pray to some unseen power, but it arises rather out of social custom. But here we are employing the technique and methods of these newly developing departments of functional psychology, viz., Psychology of Religion and Social Psychology. The results of these two are shedding light on that which has commonly been considered the highest type of religious experience the life of man has produced—*mysticism*. "The Psychology of Mysticism" is the field in which we shall hope to find solutions for some of the problems offered by a study of the prophetic consciousness. In order, therefore, to study the prophetic experience in the light of the psychology of mysticism it will be necessary to equate the prophet and mystic, showing how the experiences of each are similar, if not identical; to this task we now turn.

Prophets and mystics are psychologically related; their experiences are similar and seem to contain the same elements. Both have visions of God and hear His voice, both have absolute confidence in Him as their directing activity, and both have the conviction of knowledge conferred in the experience of divine illumination. Briefly, then, short periods of rapture, ineffable experiences, seeing or hearing God and learning from him—these are common to both prophet and mystic.

Mystics are found in all higher religions and at varied stages and periods of the development of these religions. They naturally have the religious forms and convictions of the faith that is native to them,

but enjoy in common a method of approach to Deity that has set them in a class by themselves. They are men and women who claim to have seen God face to face and to know for a certainty that He has appeared and spoken to them. Direct communion with God has been vouchsafed, and this lifts them to a plane higher than the rest of humanity and to that degree of authority wherein souls less blessed come to them for knowledge and guidance. This distinctive feature is stressed in an introductory section of *Studies in Mysticism* by Rufus Jones, wherein it is written, "mysticism is that type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relations with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the divine presence." Or as Delacroix says: "Le mystique est celui qui croit appréhender immédiatement le divin, éprouver *intérieurement* la présence divine."<sup>1</sup>

The definition of mysticism that is usually cited and is considered valuable as a basis of sociological approach is that which William James offers in a chapter of *Varieties of Religious Experience*, called "Mysticism." He describes four qualities or tags, which if one can pin them on to any religious experience one can call it mystical. These four are taken from the claims of mystics themselves and are just those peculiarities they almost universally tell about. They are: Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transcendency, and Passivity. Although the oncoming of the mystical states may be facilitated by preliminary voluntary operations, yet when the characteristic sort of consciousness once sets in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power. A good illustration of this is found in II Kings 3:13, where, when asked for prophetic advice, Elisha said: "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, the hand of Yahweh came upon him."

Thus one of the most striking characteristics of the mystics as well as of the prophets is their immediacy of perception: they have seen God or Christ, or some form that has delineated the Deity to their minds, heard his voice and in many cases held communication with him in the manner of Paul on the Damascus road. The call of Isaiah illustrates this feeling of direct contact with Yahweh

<sup>1</sup> *Études d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, Preface, p. 7.



through the senses. Isaiah says, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up . . . and I heard the voice of the Lord." From Isaiah 6:1-12 we observe that the prophet had a vision or trance, wherein he saw the matchless majesty of Yahweh in the aspect of monarch, sitting on a great throne in the Temple. The seraphim hovered about and cried incessantly the royal trisagion. Other significant elements were the shaking of the foundation of the threshold and the filling of the house with smoke. The beholder's mental powers are alert, as he is conscious of his own insignificance and unworthiness in the presence of such majesty.

A few illustrations of this from the lives of the great mystics will show us how forceful and clear were these perceptions. St. Teresa saw clearly and wrote illuminatingly of her experiences: "I was in prayer one day—it was the feast of the glorious St. Peter—when I saw Christ close by me, or to speak more correctly, felt Him: for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body, nothing with the eyes of the soul. He seemed to be close beside me: and I saw too, as I believe that it was He who was speaking to me. As I was utterly ignorant that such a vision was possible, I was extremely afraid at first, and did nothing but weep: however, when He spoke to me but one word to reassure me, I recovered myself, and was, as usual, calm and comforted, without any fear whatever. Jesus Christ seemed to be by my side continually."<sup>1</sup> It was like an illumination of the understanding which made her see clearly that "Jesus Christ, son of the Virgin, was there."<sup>2</sup> On the feast day of St. Paul he appeared to her during mass, "In all His very sacred humanity, as one describes Him raised from the dead, with an ineffable beauty and majesty."<sup>3</sup>

Another type of divine communion is that of Suso, a German mystic, who lived in the fourteenth century. He became a Dominican monk at the age of thirteen, studied diligently at the University of Cologne, and proved such an unusually apt student that he was about to be awarded the degree of doctor of theology at a very early age, but a voice from God forbade the acquisition of this honor, saying to him: "Thou knowest well enough already to give voice to God and to draw men to Him by thy preaching." Immediately he

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Evelyn Underhill in *Mysticism*, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Delacroix, *Études d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Vie de St. Jérôme*, p. 299.



began preaching, and with such zeal that he became famous as a preacher and as a guide of souls in the Mystic Way. His religious experiences he related to one of his friends who set them down and circulated them, but when he discovered this he made her recall them and burnt up all the copies he could procure. He was stopped, however, from finishing the job by a heavenly message, forbidding this destruction. Later in his life he added to this material himself. Besides this valuable material we have his *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*.

Although he entered the monastery at thirteen and strove conscientiously to be sincerely religious, he dated the beginning of his religious life with his conversion in his eighteenth year which marks the beginning of his mystic life. Previously he had been a seeker after truth, but he could not attain: when he turned toward something which seemed good and desirable, he was disturbed: he found neither happiness nor quiet. It seemed to him that something still unknown could give peace to his heart; he sought something without knowing what he sought. Finally he was delivered from this trouble by a secret illumination of God which inclined him to a new life. Shortly after this feeling of victory he had an ecstatic experience. He was alone in the choir on St. Agnes' day; he had a strong feeling of keen suffering. Suddenly he saw and heard what no tongue could express. It was without form or being and yet had within itself the joy of all forms and all manner of beings. It was at the same time the totality of desire and of accomplishment in the forgetfulness of everything and of self. It was the happiness of eternal life in rest and silence. This state lasted an hour or a half hour; when he returned to his senses it seemed to him that he was coming back from another world; his body suffered much, and he groaned at finding himself back. He walked from the choir mechanically, still saturated with the divine marvel, and lightly as if he were soaring in the air. Thus the revelations of St. Teresa, Suso, and likewise St. Catherine of Siena, Angela of Fogilano, and Tauler are on the plan of a dialogue—intimate colloquies with the mystery of the divine Reality. Pascal's memorial was a record of a vision of God in fire which may be compared with the vision that initiated Ezekiel's prophetic career, the experience of Moses at Horeb (Exod. 3:3) and

of Elijah at the same place (I Kings 19:12); all these theophanies are empyreal.

Al-Ghazzali, a great Mohammedan theologian of the eleventh century, like Pascal, became dissatisfied with a brilliant intellectual career, and sought to get closer to reality and to God. He suffered mental pangs in the futile efforts, and finally left his position, home, and friends and joined himself with a sect of his faith practicing asceticism, and famed as mystics. He became a Sufi and found his rest and happiness in mystic experiences which brought him face to face with Allah. In his writings he connects the mystic transport with prophetism.<sup>1</sup>

"Whoever has had no experience of the transport, knows of the true nature of prophetism nothing but the name. The chief properties of prophetism are perceptible only during the transport, by those who embrace the Sufi life (Mystics). The transport which one attains by the method of the Sufis is like immediate perception, as if one touched the object with one's hand."<sup>2</sup> In speaking of the Sufis being on the true and only path to the knowledge of God, Al-Ghazzali said: "The light in which they walk is essentially the same as the light of prophecy. Muhammed was a Sufi when on his way to be a prophet."<sup>3</sup> In these illuminating sentences he tells us what we have observed in the case of other mystics, viz., that the mystic breaks down all sensuous barriers and gets directly to God and speaks with him. He also tells us that those who have not had the transport have no understanding of the prophetic experience or message. But Al-Ghazzali never went so far in his assertion of mystic experience as one of his distinguished predecessors who gave expression to a classic phrase expressing the intimacy of the mystic union "Ana al Haqq" (I am God).<sup>4</sup>

Another feature marked in its clarity is the mystic's emphatic assertion that a knowledge of things eternal has been gained, and that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. on Al-Ghazzali, Duncan B. Macdonald, "The Life of Al-Ghazzali," *JAOS*, XX, 71-132; Miguel Asin Palacios, "La Mystique d'al-Ghazzali," *Mélanges de la Faculté de L'université Saint-Joseph*, VII, 67-103; Auguste Schmölders, *Essai sur les Écoles philosophiques chez les Arabes*, Paris, 1842; R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Schmölders, *op. cit.*, pp. 61 and 62.

<sup>3</sup> "Ihya ulum id din," quoted by Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> al Halaj in *Kitab al Tawassin*, cf. *Der Islam*, III, 248-57, article "Ana al Haqq" by Louis Massignon.

God himself has revealed to the mind of his servant the reality of his divine existence and the attitude of mind he wants his servants to have toward him. "He to whom the eternal word speaketh, is delivered from many an opinion,"<sup>1</sup> said one of them. Similarly, the prophet Amos gives expression to the feeling that he is propelled to speak God's will through an irresistible assurance of divine duty. His telling preface in speaking forth the word of threat or doom to the people is, "Hear this word that Yahweh has spoken" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). The certitude that it is the speaking of God, he expresses picturesquely and emphatically in 3:8; "The lion hath roared, who will not hear? The Lord Yahweh hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" When Amaziah, priest of Bethel, tried to intimidate Amos and challenge his right to speak in the king's sanctuary, the prophet answered: "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees; and Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said unto me, go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (7:14, 15). This conviction of a call from God, coming unto him unanticipated and unsought, and carrying with it an immediate knowledge of God's will revealed unto him, sent him on a mission that king and priest could not alter nor side-track! He was imbued with the identical passion that Micah described in these telling words: "But as for me, I am full of power by the spirit of Yahweh, and of judgment and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (3:8). Jeremiah said: "There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forebearing" (20:9).

Many mystics have cultivated a technique to produce ecstatic experiences—the so-called "Mystic Way." Truly we do not have this among the prophets, but we have signs of its beginning. The preparation to remove worldly disturbances is not wholly lacking in the archives of prophetic traditions. Balaam apparently depended on darkness for his stimulus: "Now, therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what Yahweh will speak to me" (Num. 22:19). And possibly the same is true of Zechariah (1:8). Saul was moved by the prophet's music (I Sam. 19:5-6) and evidently it was Samuel's expectation and intention that he should be

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis: *Imitatio Christi*, chap. iii.



so moved to prophesy. The writer of Chronicles at least considered music a prophetic accompaniment, for he chronicles that "David and the captains of the host set apart for the service certain of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals." And there is even that *prima facie* evidence of II Kings 3:5 which is self-explanatory: "And Elisha said; but now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Yahweh came upon him." One is tantalized also to know if Isaiah had some definite way in which to approach Yahweh, especially when, in chapter 7, he had such perfect confidence in his ability to attain some sign from Yahweh.

The prophetic visions are as real as those of the mystics, the gratuitous assumption that they are merely literary devices introduces a greater psychical tangle than the acceptance of them as valid. To be sure, in the degeneracy of prophecy into apocalyptic, there is this crude copying of the prophetic style, but there is no sound psychological basis for assuming this in the case of the great prophets. When we turn to the psychological study of these phenomena of the prophetic calls and visions we shall find less evasive explanation.

Professor James in his monumental study in the psychology of religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, has a section on mysticism (chaps. xvi and xvii), which anyone approaching this theme for the first time will do well to study at the very start. The principle on which he bases this study, and, indeed, that on which he bases the study of varied phenomena treated throughout the book, is this: "Phenomena are best understood when placed within their own series, studied in their germ and over-ripe decay, and compared with their exaggerated and degenerated kindred" (p. 382). In other words he seeks out the common psychical elements in mysticism, the germ of it, so to speak, which is commonplace in every human being's make-up, and when thus on common ground shows how this simple psychical factor is heightened to produce the ecstasy of union with God. Expressed in other words, this is offering an ascending scale of "rudiments." This method of serial study makes it possible for us to see the phenomena in growth and action, and makes it possible for us to reach conclusions about it. He starts with experi-

ences of no special religious connotation, and ends with the highest pretensions thereto. James's conclusion is that "our normal wakening consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. . . . No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded" (p. 388). These states of consciousness may be traced up from the psychic experiences of most of us, through varying degrees of intensity of these same psychic experiences, to the higher mystical revelations. Delacroix, in his important contribution to the study of the psychology of mysticism, *Études d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, in a manner similar to that of James, uses the concept of subconscious brain activities to explain this phenomenon of mystic visions: "These automatisms are the realization, in visual and auditory images, of a secret and permanent personality of a superior type to the conscious personality. They are its voice, the exterior projection of its life. They translate to the conscious personality the suggestion of the subconscious, and they permit the continuous penetration of the conscious personality by these deeper activities. They establish a communication between these two planes of existence, and, by their imperative nature, they tend to make the inferior subordinate to the superior." The later workers in this field believe that they may be understood in terms of every-day experiences, and that they do not require a transcendental medium of communication.

Among those who take this attitude we may mention Professor Hocking, who treats this subject in his *Meaning of God in Human Experience* (chaps. xxvii and xxviii). He begins with the obvious fact, testified to by all mystics, of the transiency of the experience; since it is transient, and therefore a phase in some natural rise and fall, some organic wave in experience, it comes within the range of law, probably the law of *rhythm*. The turning away from the world—the ineffable mystical experience marking the limits of the up-swing—and the turning back again, constitute a normal rhythm or alternation which has many analogies, and a vital function in the human mind capable of psychological expression. Mysticism must therefore take its place among the normal alternations of life, such as sleeping and waking, work and recreation, conflict and co-operation, society

and solitude, hunger and satisfactions of various types. "I am inclined, therefore," says Hocking, "to regard the mystical experience as a normal incident in the attainment of a new psychical level: and no exceptional incident, but one which, in various forms and degrees is a recurrent event in every person's life" (pp. 396-97). In this manner Hocking places the mystic experience in an organic relation to the rest of life.

The highest point reached in the ecstasy of the traditional mystic is a thorough detachment from his waking world. This disconnection is what is usually condemned as abnormal, as having an air of mystery, and producing the ineffableness above referred to. But the ineffable quality which the mystic makes so much of is due to the fact of discontinuity alone, not to any inherent mysteriousness or unnaturalness in the content of the experience. Psychologically, mystery is felt whenever there are two bodies of experience not in perfect communication, quite apart from the question whether the one or the other is inherently wonderful or weird. Mystery does not lie in either of the two bodies by itself; it expresses the effort of each to make terms with the other, and the beginning of success. The mystic is one who is confronted with a body of new experience in such a wise that he is the possessor of two bodies of experience, neither of which he can doubt.

A preliminary step toward the understanding of the prophetic experience will be an explanation of the content of his experience. Prophets and mystics alike claim that they have attained first-hand knowledge of God, and of Divine Reality, and that they attained this by being released from the main current of religious life. But the mystic and prophet come back from their experience with the material and concepts common to the religion of their group. The Catholic mystics see God in terms of the theology of their church, the Brahmin is absorbed in a divinity that is unmistakably Indian, the Sufi smacks of Mohammedanism, and all the prophets see Yahweh and learn from him the things that concern their contemporaries and themselves. In other words, a given religion confirms itself through its mystics and its prophets. The conception of Yahweh the prophet attains is that he absorbs from his surroundings. This is especially true in the imagery used in mystical vision.

We observe, then, that the content of the prophetic vision is nothing but that which can be accounted for in a psychological con-



sideration of the religious atmosphere the prophet breathed. The differentiating medium is not the divine knowledge attained nor is it the style or form in which its language clothes it. We still have to turn our attention to the prophets themselves as personalities and ask ourselves what peculiar, personal, temperamental factor makes them develop to an extreme degree what is experienced in lesser measure by other men. Here we have to consider the unusual suggestibility that brings the prophet to use his interpretation of experience as his actual experience; his instinctive heritage and the evaluation of the social factors manifested in environment.

When, however, we turn to the study of the *temperament* we recognize a vital factor in the genesis of the peculiar prophetic-mystical experience. The mystic's personal life usually reveals a temperament of pronounced type—one of *enhanced sensitivity*. By this pronounced sensitivity of temperament we do not mean that they were born with an irresistible penchant for prophetic experiences, but rather that their natures were such that, given the environmental stimuli, they would react in terms of mystical experiences. The enhanced sensitivity of the prophet and mystic is especially evidenced in his negative reaction to his environment. Things are not right; God's will is not being done, men are crying "Peace, peace," when for the people there can be no peace. The stress of the prophetic soul with all its sensitiveness must break out somewhere and find relief from the pressure. So Leuba says truly, "The profoundest need of the mystic is mental peace." The dammed up forces react and interact below the threshold of the clearest consciousness, and come from the outer fringe to the very center of attention as intuitions of exceptional vividness and meet the need of the situation clearly.

Thus, prophetic visions, of a piece with mystical revelations, have been traced down to formal conditions—physiological and psychological. It has been observed that prophets and mystics are highly suggestible, and suggestibility leads them to regard as actual experience that which analysis shows to be only an interpretation of experience.

In turning to Ezekiel with the thought in mind that he is a kindred spirit, psychologically, with the great family of mystics, we have provided ourselves with an orientation that will direct us to a better understanding of his prophecies. His book offers us two sorts of revelations; one auditory, bearing the caption: "And the word of

Yahweh came unto me, saying . . . .” or such variations as: “And thou, son of man, prophesy against, or set thy face against . . . .”; the other visionary, with auditory messages accompanying, and introduced by: “The hand of Yahweh was upon me.” The first is more numerous, the second is confined to five visions with which we shall concern ourselves. These are: (1) The Initial Call, 1:4—3:15; (2) The Vision of the Siege and Fall of Jerusalem, 3:22—5:17; (3) The Vision of the Abominations and Ruin of Jerusalem, chaps. 8–11; (4) The Vision of the Valley of Bones, 37:1–14; (5) The Vision of the Restored Temple and Land, chaps. 40–48.

There is a certain technique of vision in Ezekiel. All five visions are introduced by the phrase, “The hand of Yahweh was upon me,” with the exception of the first, where the phrase is recorded in the third person: “The hand of Yahweh was upon *him*.” In four of the five the form under which Yahweh appears is the same, in the other his appearance is not described, as it is but a brief vision (37:1–14). In the first and third visions there are detailed descriptions of the likeness of Yahweh, essentially identical, and in the second and fifth the phrase, “The Glory, or Vision, which I saw by the river Chebar” refers to the same descriptions. In three of these visions the prophet refers to his experiences as **בִּרְאוֹת**, things seen, or appearances. When speaking of false vision which Yahweh gave to the other prophets, he uses another word, **הִזְוִי**. The locus of the first vision was the bank of the Chebar, and was referred to as being “on the Plain” (**אֶל-הַבְּקָעָה**). In the third he is sitting in his house with the elders of Judah before him: the last vision is not localized. As for the immediate occasions of the visions, the first is given as the rising of an ominous stormy wind and cloud, the third, the coming of the elders of Judah to inquire concerning the will of Yahweh, and the last, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the captivity, on New Year’s day of that year, which we may presume to have been the occasion of emotional recollections. The second vision was probably occasioned by the mental and physical effects of the first, as he sat in dumbness and wonder; the message of what he was to tell the people was not given in the first vision, but comes in the second. The fourth vision was probably occasioned by the news of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel presumably had other visions which were not recorded in his book, as witness the reference in 33:22: “Now the hand of

Yahweh had been upon me in the evening before he that was escaped came; and my mouth was opened and I was no more dumb." This is the technical phrase that introduces visions, and doubtless refers to another one which he had. We note also that this fragmentary reference to another vision has a significant addendum telling of his attendant dumbness. This after-effect of dumbness seems to have followed regularly his ecstatic visions, and is frequently referred to (3:15; 3:26; 24:27; 29:21; 33:22). The last long vision in chapters 40-48 has no reference to this after-effect, but in any case it would be an easy inference that the habit of ecstatic experience had been so established in him as to cease to occasion organic disturbance.

After the first vision resulting in his call, we see the full effect of his experience upon his organism: "And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days." But among mystics, vision has often resulted in a weakening of the physical powers. Tauler said: "Believe me, children, one who would know much about these higher matters would often have to take to his bed, for his body could not support it." We have only to remember that Paul was blind, three days after his experience, and that Zacharias, like Ezekiel, was dumb for a time following his vision (Acts 9:9; Luke 1:22). Suso relates that as a result of his initial vision "His body suffered much." One more effect of a vision is worth comparing with the experience of the mystics; that in 3:3, where the roll which he ate became in his mouth as honey for sweetness. The mystics report the ravishing effect of ecstatic experiences in similar terms, as witness the sentence previously quoted from Suso: "The powers of his soul were filled full of the sweet taste of heaven, just as when a choice electuary has been poured out of a box, the box still keeps the flavor of it." One recalls St. Teresa's favorite phrases: "Sweet pain" and "Delicious suffering."

The tendency of some students of Ezekiel to consider his visions "merely literary forms" and "products of a careful study and composition" because of their length,<sup>1</sup> will hardly appeal to psychologists who are cognizant of the vast possibility of the organism's psychic reach. A mass of stimuli, auditory and visual, may flare up to consciousness in a moment of ecstasy, or the mystical moment may be of longer duration. Suso tells that his first mystical experi-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Toy, art. "Ezekiel" in *Enc. Bib.*; and "Ezekiel," *Polychrome Bible*, p. 91.



ence lasted at least half an hour. One day, St. Teresa, while in orison, had a vision in which she was transported to Hell, saw the horror, and felt the anxiety, sadness, and despair of the inmates. She was so moved that she resolved to labor more than ever for the salvation of souls and to save them from this misery.<sup>1</sup> This experience, being transported, seeing the condition of the people, and being returned, is not unlike the trip of Ezekiel to Jerusalem in "Visions of Yahweh," and is fully as long in duration. In commenting on the transiency of the mystical experience James said: "Except in rare instances, half an hour or at most an hour or two seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day."<sup>2</sup> With a mass of evidence, historical and psychological, available in relation to this phase of the mystical experience, it is hardly necessary to exempt Ezekiel's experiences as impossible psychologically. We do not question the reliability of the mystics' accounts of their immediate contacts with reality, and there has as yet been submitted no valid reason for doing so in the case of Ezekiel.

We shall do well to accept in good faith Ezekiel's account of Yahweh's appearing to him, the beginning of which is simple enough. "And I looked and behold a stormy wind came out of the North, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof, as it were, glowing metal, out of the midst of the fire" (1:4). It can easily be seen how the ominous approach of the storm-cloud and lightning, with the rapid rise of the wind, could stimulate the senses to add to the surge of nature other related features. The eye, being always under stimulation, sees other forms in the approaching clouds, and as Watson well says: "From illusion to hallucination there is only a step."<sup>3</sup>

Around the storm-cloud from the North rapidly grows the great theophany, detail by detail. The fire first, the creatures, their characteristics, the wheels, their symmetrical movement, the firmament above all, and finally the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. Observe how the matchless empyreal majesty speedily and symmetrically unfolds itself from the central core, from the simple to the sublime, from the dark cloud to the Shekinah of God, evolving

<sup>1</sup> Delacroix, *Études d'Histoires et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>2</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> *Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist*, p. 111.

and convoluting as consciousness slips its conventional moorings and floats on the uncharted sea of mystical depths and heights! The unfettered imagination builds up its new concepts, and builds firmly, for, as has been said already, on all other occasions save one, when the prophet experiences a vision of Yahweh, Yahweh appears in the same form as that evolved on the plain by the Chebar.

This method of Ezekiel's neural mechanism of revealing in the vision itself the way in which it was built up, is manifested in the other five visions. To mention the last first, as it is the longest, we may turn to chapters 40-48. There we observe that the prophet does not see the Temple at a glance from the hill. He sees the messenger who takes him through it bit by bit: first the measurement of the wall, then the steps, breadth of the threshold, and so on till the Temple is ultimately drawn out in a mass of stipulated detail. So in the vision of dry bones: first the bones appear in the valley, then they come together, then sinew and flesh come over them, then breath in them, and finally they stand upon their feet, "an exceeding great army." Witness also this method in the two visions of destruction. In 3:22-5:17, the city drawn on the tile, the siege about it, the eating of siege food, the scattering of hairs as people scatter after the fall, etc.—from the walled city to the captivity of its people, with all intermediate steps graded as per the accustomed manner! In chapters 8-11 the prophet is brought to the city, crawls through a hole in the wall, observes the secret abominations, then out into the Temple proper, cumulatively observing the reasons for the destruction of the city. He hears the command given to the destroying angels, sees them go off to execute it, sees the havoc wrought, and hears their report. Thus the detail is gathered, and when once his sub-conscious process breaks through, it wells up until a flood-tide of achievement and accomplishment is registered. Hence its method: from the natural every-day experience to the mystical vision of revelatory conviction.

The first two visions are the call and the instruction of the prophet in his work as a revealer of Yahweh's will. In the first vision he is sent to the people and is told what kind of a reception to expect, and assured that "they are a rebellious house." But his message is not given him. In the next vision, however, Yahweh lays

before him his purposes concerning Jerusalem, picturing to him its siege, suffering and destruction, following these with a speech explaining his reasons therefor, and his determination in the matter. The second vision, opening with 3:22, should follow immediately after 3:15 as 3:16-21 is apparently a misplaced fragment belonging to the later work of Ezekiel.<sup>1</sup> The "there" of 3:22 refers to the setting in 3:15, the prophet's sitting overwhelmed among the captives for seven days. He is told that he shall remain in his present condition of dumbness till the Lord shall have given him an auditory message to speak to the people, which he does in 6:1. As this second vision dawns on him, it covers the ground of the first vision: the same glorious appearance of Yahweh in the same place, the prophet's falling on his face, the spirit setting him on his feet, the hearing of the judgment of Judah, "For they are a rebellious house," and then the new material follows—the purpose of Yahweh to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem, and the prophet's commission to preach this to the exiles. The actions of chapters 4 and 5, which have been so difficult of comprehension and exegesis, are simply the dramatic way in which the revelation concerning the destruction came before the prophet.<sup>2</sup> In a dream state or trance he hears the directions, and as he hears them his muscles go through the incipient twitchings of performing the actions, he sees them in his mind's eye, and comprehends fully the message: "This is Jerusalem."

The text does not say he went out and did these things before the people, nor does Yahweh command that. Yahweh had specifically said that the prophet was to remain silent till he received a specific message for the people, and at the close of the vision, 5:5-17, Yahweh interprets the meaning of the vision in a message that is obviously for the prophet and not for the people. The action of the vision is similar to that in the first vision, where he eats the roll of the book, or to the third vision, where the prophet in visionary state,

<sup>1</sup> Kraetzschmar, *Das Buch Ezechiel*, pp. 35-36, following Ewald, puts 3:16-21 at the beginning of the second period of the prophet's activity with chap. 33. Cf. also Bertholet, *Das Buch Hesekiel*, p. 22, who says: "zwischen vv. 21 und 22 klafft augenscheinlich eine Lücke."

<sup>2</sup> Much of the critical difficulty has been due to the breaking up of the vision into separate actions or symbolic acts of the prophet and handling each individually. It should be noted that these separate units are not preceded by "And the word of Yahweh came unto me saying" as is the case in the rest of the book of Ezekiel. This bespeaks the unity of the passage.



prophesies against the leaders of Judah, and Pelatiah fell down dead, or to the action in the vision of the valley of bones, wherein he prophesies to the bones and they respond. It all happened in a vision.<sup>1</sup> As has been already pointed out, the action or movement of the vision is sequential, and follows the technique on the basis of which the other visions of the prophet are built up. Where there is symbolic action in the book of Ezekiel enjoined by Yahweh, chapters 12 and 24, the prophet says: "I did as I was commanded."

Thus psychology is inclined to take things as it finds them: it accepts the visions as real, and sees no occasion to push them aside as literary devices: it sees 3:22—5:17, as a unit, a vision, and does not presume that the prophet performed impossible symbolical feats before the people: it accepts the prophet's literal words when it finds him saying: "I saw a storm-wind, a great cloud coming out of the north."

In making a psychological analysis of the visions of Ezekiel we shall follow the three lines of investigation suggested in the preceding section, and seek to learn the part played by (1) instinctive tendencies, (2) environment, (3) temperament.

Human behavior is engaged in the ceaseless task of adjusting the organism to its environment, and the word "instinct" represents those forms of reaction to environment which the organism has found most effective in maintaining itself against the forces with which it has to struggle. Whenever there is a difficult situation, a tension, strain, or restlessness arises, a seeking of release, which leads the organism to exert itself to the utmost. It is just at this point that the serviceability of instinctive tendencies is manifest, and, indeed, the attainment of mental power is traceable to a few instinctive reactions up to the requirement of a disciplinary imagination. Biologically, this instinctive tendency to seek release from strain is so significant that consciousness itself emerges as a phase of the response to difficult and urgent needs of the organism. But when the strain is released

<sup>1</sup> The material of chaps. 4, 5, has been viewed as allegory and symbol. The most difficult of all, the prophet lying on his side 390 plus 40 days—is variously explained as enforced stillness due to two periods of cataleptical paralysis (Kraetzschmar following Ewald and Klostermann), or as deliberate symbolical action, the prophet taking this symbolic posture only when there were on-lookers (Gautier, *La Mission du Prophète Ezechiel*, p. 93). The Greek text has 150 days which is a considerable reduction over the Massoreic. The Hebrew figures are probably the correct ones, the Greek translators having taken the narrative as a literal performance actually carried through, sought to make this performance easier.

and the new adjustment formed, there develops a new manner of reaction, based on this new experience, hence new habits are formed and in time supplant the old ways of reacting. The literature of mysticism has frequent utterances of a sense of lack, of estrangement, of having lost one's way, and other phases which point to a lack of proper adjustment, and a failure of conventional ideas to give proper reactions to environment. Delacroix made a psychological study of the lives of five outstanding mystics and pointed out how clearly periods of intense strain were succeeded by release and peace. In the case of St. Teresa especially he observed that the tendency was from obstructed, disorganized, painful situations to a marvelous peace of mind, serenity, and accentuated power of activity.<sup>1</sup> If, as Professor Watson says,<sup>2</sup> "the function of instinct is only to initiate a process of learning," it does lead the mystic to learn a way out of his dilemma.

This tendency we may presume is closely akin to the individual's desire for security or safety, one of the four attitudes of fundamental types of human behavior which Professor W. I. Thomas enumerates as those the individual cannot avoid response to under certain stimulations of the social group.<sup>3</sup> We are not unaware of the tendency of the behavioristic school of psychologists to pare down the number and function of instincts, but the facts herein discussed will be just as valid psychologically under some other terminology.<sup>4</sup>

The situation in which Ezekiel found himself was certainly one of great strain, especially his social situation. He was first of all a member of a group that was seeking adjustment under the most trying ordeal—strangers in a strange land. They had lived through the high expectations that had followed the Deuteronomic reform, the overthrow of foreign religious practices, and the centralizing of worship in Jerusalem. But the blessings did not come. A series of disasters culminated in captivity.

Thus these exiles, hopes dashed, homes gone, social positions inverted, faith shattered, seek adjustment to their new environment in varying terms. Some, not being able to worship in Babylon,

<sup>1</sup> *Études d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme.*

<sup>2</sup> *Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist*, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> *Suggestions of Modern Science Concerning Education* by Jennings and others, 1920. Chapter by W. I. Thomas. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas and Znaniecki, 1920; see Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> See Watson, *Psychology from Standpoint of a Behaviorist*, pp. 266 f.

concluded Yahweh had forgotten them, and proceeded to make themselves at home in the new place. Some concluded they would soon return to Jerusalem, and waited in hope. Some thought they were being punished for their fathers' wickedness, and still others seem to have resented the thought that their fellow-Jews in Jerusalem should enter into their surrendered portions. Many of them sought to know Yahweh's will and turned to those to whom they were accustomed to look—the prophet and priest, as Jeremiah, chapter 29, shows. In Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1, we find the elders of Judah, or some of them, coming to the prophet for this knowledge. Doubtless his compatriots looked to him even before his visions, because of his education and training, and this fact, at least, to say nothing of his own consciousness, trained in the worship of Yahweh, must have brought home to him with tremendous force the need of understanding the things of the exile which meant mystery and misery and multitudinous mental complexities.

But what of Ezekiel in the midst of this social group seeking radical adjustment? His education and training for the priesthood in Jerusalem under the atmosphere created by the Deuteronomic reform gave him definite notions about the history of Judah and Yahweh's relation to the nation. That is, his whole thought process, his way of thinking, had been shaped by his training to serve in the temple priesthood. His life-habits were set in that direction, and his ideas of God's relation to his people gave him confidence in Yahweh's care for his covenant people.

Now, a man with his training, these habits of thought, and these hopes for his life's calling, finds himself rudely transplanted to a foreign environment, with no chance to exercise his calling, and with little or no preparation for personal adjustment to the new situation. The glory of the temple of Yahweh is dwarfed and eclipsed by the splendor and power of the Babylonian empire. Men are questioning Yahweh's care for his people, and his power. In other words, there is a great strain, a problem, if you please, involved in making an adjustment from the old order or situation, which shaped the thoughts and hopes of life, to the new, which must be lived in and through. There are ideas of God calling for recasting and explanation. This conflict between value and reality, or everyday experience, is one of the fertile sources of mystical experience. The young priest, pressed



and oppressed by the strain of environmental conflict, feeling the incumbency the people put upon him to find the solution, and inspired by the urge of his own sensitive soul, finds release as generations of mystics find it—in vision. This we see in the case of Pascal, who struggled to unify three systems of reactions, or environments—his Paris drawing-room philosophy, his stern Jansenic religious convictions, and his mathematico-scientific training. The strain was almost unbearable, but the relief in a mystic vision of God in fire was positive and certain.

An *impasse* on a larger and more socialized scale is called to witness in the development of the Neo-Platonic mysticism. The old culture of the Roman Empire sought to maintain itself against the barbarian incursions, the intellectual tendencies of Christianity, and other oriental influences. Neo-Platonism was an attempt to hold on to the ideals of the passing social order in the face of a new one coming on: its mysticism arose from the clinging to ideas no longer able to function.

Prophetism itself arises in times of stress. Samuel and the sons of the prophets came in the time of the Philistine domination over Israel. And says Cornill: "Es ist kein Zufall dass das erste Auftreten der wahren Profetie, in Israel, zusammenfällt mit dem ersten Auftreten der Assyrier."<sup>1</sup> In fact, one may make bold to say that all of Israel's great religious advances came out of times of stress and suffering and pain, from the sojourn in Egypt to the struggles of the Maccabees. Pain is the great stimulator of religious experience, and we have yet to work out from a psychological approach, the relation of pain and suffering to religious progress. In the sixteenth century, Salomon Molcho, Jewish prophet and messiah, appeared in Portugal at the time when the persecutions of the Jews were at their height, Jews being burned, butchered, and massacred in the streets.<sup>2</sup> The Cevenal prophets, similarly, appeared among the persecuted protestants at Cevannes, after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, when frightful massacres were perpetrated there.<sup>3</sup> And shall we say also that Ezekiel and second Isaiah are products of Israel's stress and exile? Old concepts, seemingly tottering to their ruin, are confirmed by a new authority, the authority of mystical revelations!

<sup>1</sup> *Prophetismus*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> D'Allonnes, *Psychologie d'une Religion*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 252 ff.

In kindred manner, voices are heard coming from God in times of personal, individual stress and bewilderment. In the twenty-eighth chapter of Jeremiah we have the story of the prophet's seeming defeat before the eyes of the people when his rival, Hananiah, broke the yoke he wore, symbolical of the yoke of Babylon on Israel, where it is written: "And the prophet Jeremiah went his way." But the next verse reads: "Then the word of Yahweh came unto Jeremiah." The apostle Paul, having crossed Asia Minor to the Aegean, wonders whether he shall retrace his steps or go over into Europe. His indecision is broken by a vision that night, wherein he sees the man from Macedonia, and hears him say: "Come over into Macedonia and help us."<sup>1</sup> Again, on the storm-tossed ship, when all is fear and there is no hope, he hears a voice: "Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Caesar; and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee."<sup>2</sup> Whenever Mohammed got into a difficult situation requiring a solution, he received from Allah the release that solved the tension. Guillaume Monod, who set himself up in Paris in 1870 (in time of stress) as the returned Christ, and who had a good following of worshipers, used to get his difficulties solved by hearing the Voice: on the occasion of his second marriage, he hesitated as to the propriety of it, but the Voice said that God wished the marriage that his son might have a witness of his intimate life.<sup>3</sup> So also when the elders of Judah came and sat before Ezekiel (8:1; 14:1; 20:1) for enlightenment after he was habituated to vision and auditory instruction, the hand of Yahweh was upon him, and he received the proper reply to give them.

It is not at all unnatural then, nor beyond the common run of psychical experience, that the solution of some of the difficulties that confronted Ezekiel and the other exiles should be solved definitely and authoritatively in a clear-cut vision of Yahweh. The probability of the immediate stimulus we have already spoken of in reference to the rising storm-cloud, as the prophet was on the plains of Babylon beside the river Chebar. But once the stimulated imagination was launched upon its hallucinatory journey, the vast well of the subliminal conscious processes overflowed into consciousness with its accumulated solutions and readjusted material accumulated from the

<sup>1</sup> Acts 16:6-10.<sup>2</sup> Acts 27:24.<sup>3</sup> D'Allonnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-86.

experience of the prophet, and problems are solved. The vision left Yahweh's glory and majesty in complete possession of Ezekiel's heart and experience, which was just what Ezekiel most desired. Almost the first words spoken gave the reason for the catastrophe of Israel: "Children of Israel . . . have rebelled against me," or as expressed frequently afterward by the prophet, "For they are a rebellious house," and his own future; "I send thee to the children of Israel." The form of the vision showed, among other things, that Yahweh still reigned in all his glory. The realization of the sins of the people and the doom surely to follow finds dramatic expression in the words of the roll: "And it was written within and without; and there were written therein lamentations, and mourning and woe." This is only a degree less impressive than a similar vision vouchsafed to Jeremiah: "Take this cup of the wine of wrath at my hand, and cause all the nations to drink it. And they shall drink and reel to and fro, and be mad because of the sword I will send among them (25:15, 16)." Ezekiel's doubts, bewilderments, and disappointments are instantly removed, and from then on he rested assured of these things: (1) Yahweh's greatness; (2) Israel's sins from of old; (3) Yahweh has spoken to the prophet; (4) Ezekiel must tell the people of their doom. As corollaries there naturally followed these: (1) The rest of the people must be carried away as they are sinning the same as their forefathers; (2) The future of the nation lies with those already in captivity; (3) These should be tested one by one, and sifted according to each one's personal relation to Yahweh.

Thus mystic vision in Ezekiel's case, as in the case of countless other mystics, again demonstrates itself to be able to be, for the prophet at least, an authoritative solver of problems, and a releaser from strain. Ezekiel knew in his heart of hearts that he had seen the Lord.

After Ezekiel had been called to be a prophet his main problems are solved in visions. In the second vision he learns the fate of Jerusalem: it is to be overthrown after a siege and its remaining inhabitants scattered and exiled. In the third vision he learns specifically why the city is to be destroyed, for he sees the abominable worship of other Gods going on in the Temple, observes the ruinous political situation



under the dominance of Jaazaniah and Pelatiah, and sees Yahweh leave the city. In the fourth, after the city has been destroyed, and oppressive gloom hangs over the captives, he learns, in the vision of bones, that Yahweh can and will restore Israel: "Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel." The assurance of hope and promise of reconstruction come out of the last vision.

It is a psychological truism that environment determines the imagery and form of release, and this is abundantly illustrated in the visions of Ezekiel. The tendency of the organism to adjust itself to the *milieu* leads it readily to get estimations of value from its environment, and its concepts of reality from the social group. The mystics of all ages have done just that: simply confirming in their experience the ideals and aspirations and highest values of those with whom they live—the *mores* of their group. The solutions they desired and attained were expressed in the imagery of their habitual contacts. Isaiah saw Yahweh in the Temple, in an atmosphere and picturation that comes readily from the religion of Israel; the Catholic mystics see Christ and the Virgin in imagery of the traditional church instruction, and the Mohammedan *Sufis* observe Allah of their *milieu*.

The content of Ezekiel's visions, seemingly new truth from Yahweh, conformed to the philosophy of history in which Ezekiel was trained. The first words of the first vision are: "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to nations which are rebellious, which have rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me even unto this day." This was the Deuteronomic indictment stressed by Jeremiah: "We have sinned against Yahweh our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day; and we have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God" (3:25). The environmental conviction, "For they are a rebellious house," receives startling confirmation from the divine afflatus. The roll of the book, which the hand reached out to him, was written within and without with lamentations and mourning and woe. If the book he saw was *the* religious book of his experience, Deuteronomy, he certainly felt the relation of Deut., chap. 28, to the life of Judah as did King Josiah when he rent his garments at its prospect.<sup>1</sup> And if the

<sup>1</sup> II Kings 22:11.

book was Israel's book of life, then surely the stressful experiences and sorrows of the exiles were patly epitomized by the three words, "lamentations, mourning and woe." "But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee." Is this pessimism? Not solely. It was common experience all too well known to the priests who knew the history and disposition of the leaders of Israel.

During the vision of abomination and ruin in Jerusalem (chaps. 8-11) the prophet sees the un-Yahwistic religious practices there indulged in, which things he must have seen there in his earlier days. For example, the five and twenty men "with their backs toward the temple of Yahweh, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshipping the sun toward the east" (8:16). This had been a common thing in Jerusalem, as we may glean from Deut. 4:19; 17:3; and Jer. 44:17; and so, too, of the worship of other gods by the women of Judah, and the burning of incense before them. In Jeremiah 44:15-19, the people even presume to defend their conduct in perpetrating these insults to Yahweh! If, as the prophet sees in his vision, chapters 8-11, the direct cause of the destruction of the city is the indulgence of the people in those esoteric religious practices, then he reaches the thought of Jeremiah in 44:23, "Because ye have burned incense and because ye have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil has happened unto you, as it is at this day."

In his closing vision, chaps. 40-48, the picture of the reconstructed Jerusalem and Israel, we have the fulfilling of the hope of all the exiles for the rebuilding of the Temple and of Jerusalem; this hope was a deep moving force in the Babylonian colony. The desire for the presence of Yahweh with the people likewise is met as the prophet sees the glory of Yahweh coming back to take up its abode in the newly constructed temple. Then also the Deuteronomic emphasis upon the significance of the priesthood comes to its own, as, in the new state the priest is given the place of precedence over the prince. The description of the temple building, 40:48-41:26, follows along the lines of the old Solomonian temple as described in I Kings, chap. 6; and the laws are similar enough to those we may presume come from the pre-Ezekiel period, to justify the assertion that they result from the prophet's personal reaction to the legal material with which he

had previously come in contact. The habits and hopes of a lifetime are gathered up into a vision of the future which was set off on the occasion of New Year's day of the twenty-fifth year of his captivity.

Thus the vital elements in these five visions come from the environment and meet the deepest needs of Ezekiel and of his compatriots in captivity. The first three are emphatic in their stress on the wickedness of the people and the destruction of Jerusalem, and the last two are the assurances of the rebuilding of a new nation out of the purified elements of the exile. He vindicated the religious habits of the past, confirmed old convictions, but gave them added force, assurance, and authority.

But there is the *form* of vision which is quite as significant as its content. In his first moment of ecstasy the prophet saw, in a bright glare of flashing light, a composite figure of four living winged creatures, each of which had four faces: those of a man, lion, ox, and eagle. Above the outstretched wings of the creatures was a firmament, and above the firmament a throne, upon which was a fiery evanescence of Yahweh—the glory of Yahweh. In this apparition Yahweh appears in all the glory of Babylonian majesty—re-echoing in Ezekiel's consciousness the things that impressed him greatly as he looked about the temples and palaces of Babylon, such as the Cherubim. Each one of these four faces has been found on some monumental survival, but no one with all four has been found.<sup>1</sup> These monuments which surrounded him and impressed him tremendously furnished him the background for his visions. The clarity with which these Babylonian scenes stamped themselves upon the impressionable prophet is vividly portrayed in his prophecy about Oholibah: "She saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans, portrayed in vermillion, girdled with girdles upon their loins, with flowing turbans upon their heads, all of them princes to look upon, after the likeness of the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their nativity" (23:14, 15). It is as Dussaud says in his article on "Les Visions d'Ezechiel"; "Il suffit en effet de lire la description d'une apparition quelconque pour se convaincre que dans toute vision se trouvent les éléments de l'image prédéterminant vue."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients*, 3d ed., p. 618.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (1898), pp. 330 ff.



Yahweh appeared in the bright flashing of fire, a common mystical phenomenon, and in the commingling of the elements which portrayed the majesty and power of the Babylonians and their gods. The wavy, fleeting aspect of divinity is quite in keeping with mystic vision. "And I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it, and round about, from the appearance of his loins and upward; and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was a brightness round about him" (1:27). One readily wonders if he were not influenced by the sun disk, so frequently seen as a picturation of deity. The totality of the appearance, from the wheels to the spirit which hovered over all, gives the prophet an ineffacable impress of the all-powerfulness, majesty, and grandeur of Yahweh. He was stricken to the earth, but rose at the bidding of the voice which spake.

We have examined the form and content of the visions, and have seen that the elements came from his experience in the environments in which he had lived. Materialistic critics of the prophets have made similar observations and have taken the attitude that the prophets were clever men who saw just what the times needed and gave their message accordingly. This assumes that the prophet's task was an intellectual one, a keen, analytic study of contemporary events. But such a gratuitous assumption, though common, is a psychological monstrosity. If the readjustment of these elements in experience was not an intellectual process, in the commonly accepted use of the term, how did it happen? How did these obvious things all get combined into a new system, and so impress the prophet that he just had to speak forth the things that suddenly came, in a given form, into his consciousness? At this point we meet the heart of the prophetic authority.

Temperament is a vital factor in the genesis of the propheticomystical experience, for it determines the method of release from a tension. A temperament of a pronounced type is usually revealed by the study of any mystic, and this temperament is one of enhanced sensitivity. In cases where there is plenty of material available dealing with the mystic's personal life, as in the case of St. Teresa, we find this enhanced sensitivity developing more and more into a

strong subjectivity and richness of subconscious (so-called) processes. Not that the mystic is born with a subjective attitude, but that this develops readily in response to environmental stimuli. For instance, we often read in the life of St. Teresa of her having visions in which definite commands were laid upon her, which, when carried out after the vision passed, led to a solution and achievement of a situation confronting her before the vision. In the same way the coming of the elders of Israel to inquire of Ezekiel what was the will of the Lord was followed by vision or verbal revelation telling them what the Lord's will was. These adjustments take place behind the scenes, so to speak, in the background of consciousness, and flash into the hot spot of attention with a force and sweep as if from without.

But we need to remember that this is an aspect of normal life, and that this aspect is now under close scrutiny in the field of psychology. These psychic adjustments taking place just below the limen of attention, variously designated, subliminal, unconscious, con-conscious and subconscious, represent the function of the stream of consciousness. There is no mystical second self, another personality, or a different way of functioning that sets off the subconscious as something different from the ordinary consciousness. Professor Münsterberg used to say that we could relate all there was to be said of the subconscious in four words: "There isn't any." He meant, of course, there was no special function or mechanism that set off the adjustments going on below the threshold of conscious attention, to explain the large amount of material which was gathered together under the caption of "Unconscious Cerebration." We now know that these things can be better understood or explained as the hypersensitivity of consciousness to actual objects of experience—the imperceptible perceptibles that influence our thought and action unobserved by the ordinary waking consciousness. While we pay attention to one thing, several other things are registering themselves through our sensations of sight or hearing which we are not conscious of at the time, but which later influence us, and our judgment. Or we put a problem to soak, so to speak, and later, at an unexpected moment, its solution appears in consciousness, dragged out by some associative connection, we know not how. Professor

Pratt well says: "If all mankind should be divided into two classes, the mystical and the non-mystical, one of the chief distinctions that would be made out between them would probably be based upon the relative importance of the margin and the center of consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

The evidence that we interpret experience with more precision in an unconscious way than we do consciously, has been worked out by a series of experiments by the laboratory method of the controlled observation. Professor Jastrow conducted experiments in which the subjects guessed at the characteristics of objects barely seen, which showed clearly the tendency of the judgments formed to have a farther reach than the items coming into consciousness. Professor Stratton summarizes the evidence for the imperceptible factor in vision, that the eye and mind are influenced by this imperceptible factor in experience.<sup>2</sup> The sense of touch was studied by Brückner likewise in the laboratory and evidence pointed to influences coming in below the level of conscious attention.<sup>3</sup> The same has been found true in the case of tones which people listening for, have not been able to hear, and yet the organism recorded them and later reacted intelligently to these unperceived influences. The organism is sensitive to things below the level of consciousness, and the effect of the slightest stimuli may change the circulation of the blood and produce other effects; it is as a photographic plate in its sensitiveness. Whatever slight excitation plays on the organism affects mentality, and causes things to pile up, and eventually produces a resultant mental attitude, and in this way many mental happenings are due to the unconscious influence of the social weather, or environment in which we live. Splashes on the surface of consciousness are due to strain underneath.

Two illustrations of this common psychic phenomenon will show its service to those who hunger and thirst after solution. The great mathematician, Sir William Rowen Hamilton, was out on a pleasure stroll one day on the streets of Dublin, with Lady Hamilton, and just as he was approaching the Brougham Bridge, the intricate conception of the invention of quaternions flashed before him. He

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup> Stratton, *Experimental Psychology in Its Bearing on Culture*, pp. 88-94.

<sup>3</sup> Brückner, *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, Vol. XXVI.



jotted a few notes in a memorandum which he had at hand, and later, was able to work them out along the "inspired" line.

An archeologist, Professor H. V. Hilprecht, had wearied himself a number of times trying to decipher two small fragments of agate which were supposed to belong to a finger ring of some ancient Babylonian. One evening, after writing a very unsatisfactory explanation of them for publication, he went to bed, weary and exhausted, and fell fast asleep. Then he dreamed that a tall priest of old Nippur led him to the treasure chamber of the Temple and addressed him:

The two fragments which you have published separately on pages 22 and 26 belong together, and are not finger rings. King Kurigalzu once sent to the temple of Bel an inscribed votive cylinder of agate. Then we priests suddenly received the command to make for the statue of the God Ninib a pair of ear-rings of agate. We were in great dismay, since there was no agate as raw material at hand. In order to execute the command there was nothing for us to do but cut the votive cylinder into three parts, thus making three rings, each of which contained a portion of the original inscription. If you will put the two together you will have the confirmation of my words.

With this he disappeared. True enough the two parts were put together and the inscription was deciphered by proper guesses for the missing portions of the middle piece:

To the god, Ninib, son of Bel, his lord, has Kurigalzu, pontifex of Bel, presented this.<sup>1</sup>

Now, people of a very sensitive and imaginative temperament have these subliminal mental processes developed to a large degree. On the one hand this development may be psychopathic and give hysteria cases: on the other it may result in genius. Psychically speaking, there is a close relation, but the line of demarcation is clear. The partial realization of the relation probably led Klostermann to find in Ezekiel all the marks of catalepsy, alalia, hallucinations, etc., but he lacked the knowledge imparted by abnormal psychology to enable him to differentiate correctly.<sup>2</sup> This psychic adjustment which most people have to a modest degree, wherein a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Joseph Jastrow, *The Subconscious*, pp. 90-91; cited by him from *PSPR*, XII, 14, 15. We are not concerned here with the truth or falsity of this solution; it is the psychological principle involved that is valid, namely, that solutions are worked out subliminally.

<sup>2</sup> Klostermann, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1877), pp. 391-439.

solution of problems is worked out subconsciously and rushes suddenly into the "hot spot" of attention, in the more fertile psychic life of the prophet flames up in visions, ecstasies, and voices. This is what we have in the case of Ezekiel's vision of his call. The strain of environmental clashes, the sense of conflict: then realignment coming suddenly into consciousness; he feels that the revelation originated externally, and hence the positive conviction that Yahweh has spoken. "The prophet ponders long over the condition of his people, the will of God, and his duty. Then some day suddenly the sought-for solution rushes into his mind—he finds the message ready-made for his tongue, and it is almost inevitable that he should preface it with the words: 'Thus saith Yahweh.'"<sup>1</sup> But this consciousness of an objective external influence has been so frequently induced arbitrarily, by such known causes as hypnotism and various forms of suggestions, that it can no longer be attributed to a supernatural force. The supernaturalistic assumption in the understanding of prophetism and mysticism has existed because men have hitherto failed to recognize that the hidden, psychic activities are a part of them as well as are their conscious efforts. "What mystery there may be is in the baffling intricacy of the mind itself, and is inherent no differently in the submerged than in the exposed stepping stones over which our thought or fancy makes its way."<sup>2</sup>

As for the recurrence of the visions and revelations, we may cite the case of auto-hypnotism, wherein the individual mystic or prophet, by paying absorbing attention to the problem at issue, succeeds in hearing a voice giving the required solution. He grows in the direction of his effort. The experience comes when the attention is fixed in that particular subject. Such phenomenon follows the law of suggestion or suggestibility.<sup>3</sup>

The temperament of a creative genius with its fertile imagination furnishes the soil for a mystical experience, and indeed there is a mystical element in certain literary achievement. Most mystics have a delicate appreciativeness and responsiveness which is in the artist and the poet, as witness St. Teresa, notably. The finer

<sup>1</sup> Pratt. *The Religious Consciousness*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Jastrow, *The Subconscious*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Boris Sidis, *Psychology of Suggestion*, pp. 50-55, 78-86.

sensitivities of the prophet Jeremiah are a case in point, and Ezekiel displays a creative literary genius, which a study of his book will reveal. His artistic temperament is evident in his taste for the picturesque, his bold literary conceptions, and his vivid descriptive ability. He has given the world some literary gems that for boldness and force are unsurpassed. His vision of the valley of bones, where each bone comes to his bone, sinews and flesh stretch over them, breath comes into them, and they stand up, a great army; his powerful lament over the kings of Judah, pictured as young lions getting ready to exercise their maturing strength, and then being enmeshed in Egyptian and Babylonian nets; his revolting picture of the new-born girl, Jerusalem, thrown out in the field to die, being rescued by Yahweh, growing to beautiful womanhood, assuming the marital relationship with him, only to play the harlot; and the rancid adulteries of the two sensuous sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, which are Jerusalem and Samaria; and the moving picture of Tyre as a merchant-ship lying off the coast; her building, her freighting, her scuttling—a forceful and effective description showing forth not only imaginative genius, but a scope of detailed geographical and mercantile knowledge amazing in one apparently not schooled to it—all bear the stamp of creative genius and literary imagination. His initial call is striking in its fantastic and effective figures. All of his visions have these vivid pictures that have become notable in the stream of religious life that flowed through Judaism and Christianity. It is Ezekiel that gives us the river of God, the stream that flows from under the threshold of the sanctuary; cleanses, heals and fructifies the land it touches: this idea of the river, “The streams whereof make glad the city of our God,” has figured prominently in the literature of apocalypse, notably in the Book of Revelation. It is Ezekiel that gives us the idea of the Shekinah, the luminous manifestation of the glory of God, and he that gives us that oft-quoted oracle of optimism, rising out of the darkest hour of the exile’s discouragement, the news of the destruction of Jerusalem: “There shall be showers of blessing.” The wheel within a wheel, the chambers of imagery, the valley of dry bones! Such pictures and phrases presage in Ezekiel an artistic temperament of extraordinary power, and result in his becoming the patron saint of the later apocalypticism and of



the pseudo-mysticism of the Jewish Kabbala. One might easily speculate whether, with a different environment, our prophet might not have been one of the world's greatest poets or artists!

Modern commentators have noted his power. Skinner writes of him: "Of the highest qualities of Ezekiel's genius the most striking is a powerful and grandiose imagination, which reveals itself in a variety of directions, now revelling in weird mythological conceptions (28, 32), and at other times clothing itself in a peculiar artificial realism."<sup>1</sup> Toy expresses himself ardently: "He is perhaps the most interesting personality in the group of prophets: he is ardent, self-confident, bold, relentless, hopeful; and these qualities are reflected in his writings. . . . Grotius compared him to Homer for knowledge, and Schiller said that he would like to learn Hebrew in order to read Ezekiel in the original."<sup>2</sup>

Our brief observations of the prophets, and more especially of Ezekiel, have led us to orient them psychologically in the great family of mystics, who have ever remained firm in their protestations that they attained unto direct and immediate contact with reality, truth, God. We have found that, not only does the psychology which explains the phenomena of mysticism lead us to an understanding of Ezekiel's visions as the product of (a) the instinctive struggles of himself and his fellow exiles to adjust to their new situation under tense mental strain, (b) the environmental thought and religious life of his *milieu*, and (c) the sensitivity of his artistic temperament; but also that it furnishes some side lights on mooted problems of criticism within the book. Among these may be mentioned: its eschewing of the tendency to look upon visions as literary devices deliberately constructed by the prophet to convey his thought, its considering 3:22—5:17 as a unit, a vision, thereby overcoming the difficulties that attended the explanations of the so-called symbolical actions of chapters 4 and 5, and its insistence on the natural development of the initial-call vision from the stimulation of the eye due to the rising storm wind, cloud, and lightning.

<sup>1</sup> Hastings, art., "Ezekiel," *Dictionary of the Bible*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 92.









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